

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2707

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PDEV PINT LE
SUBJ: PARTITION OF LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 2517

1. SUMMARY:. AS THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS IN LEBANON AND AREA TENSIONS CONTINUE, THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME FORM OF PARTITION IN LEBANON MAY OCCUR INCREASES. THIS MESSAGE DISCUSSES IN SUMMARY FORM THE ATTITUDES OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES, HOW PARTITION MIGHT COME ABOUT, THE NEAR CERTAINTY OF RENEWED MAJOR FIGHTING IN LEBANON IF IT DOES, WHAT A PARTITIONED LEBANON MIGHT LOOK LIKE, THE IMPACT ON THE ME PEACE PROCESS, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY. BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THESE TOPICS AND OUR DESIRE TO KEEP THIS MESSAGE AS SHORT AS POSSIBLE, A NUMBER OF POINTS ARE OVERSIMPLIFIED. WE HAVE NOT REACHED A JOINT CONCLUSION BECAUSE WE IN THIS EMBASSY ARE NOT AGREED ON WHAT THE USG SHOULD DO ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02707 01 OF 02 151126Z

LEBANON.

2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS PARTITION.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW MARONITE EXTREMISTS, MOST LEBANESE CHRISTIANS DO NOT REPEAT NOT FAVOR PARTITION EXCEPT AS A LAST RESORT--THAT IS, AS AN

ALTERNATIVE TO BEING ABSORBED BY SYRIA OR DOMINATED BY A MOSLEM STATE. THE PALESTINIANS PROBABLY WOULD NOT OBJECT TO DE FACTO PARTITION WHICH GAVE THEM CONTROL OVER ONE PORTION OF THE COUNTRY BUT IN OUR JUDGMENT THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT A PALESTINIAN STATE IN LEBANON AS A REPLACEMENT FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE IN PALESTINE. LEBANESE MOSLEMS AND DRUZE, EXCEPT FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY FRINGE, PREFER THE STATUS QUO ANTE, BUT WITH ENHANCED STATUS FOR THEMSELVES. OTHERWISE THEY ARE FACED WITH THE UNPLEASANT PROSPECT OF BECOMING SECOND CLASS CITIZENS IN EITHER A CHRISTIAN OR PALESTINIAN-DOMINATED MINI-STATE. THE SYRIANS OPPOSE THE PARTITION OF LEBANON BUT MIGHT UNDER SOME CIRCUMSTANCES ACCEPT IT IF PARTITION MEANT THAT SYRIA GOT THE BEKAA VALLEY, AND POSSIBLY TRIPOLI. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT OTHER ARABS OPPOSE PARTITION IN LEBANON IN PRINCIPLE BUT ARE NOT VERY DEEPLY INTERESTED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. ISRAEL PRESUMABLY SUPPORTS THE IDEA BECAUSE IT ADDS TO CONFUSION AND DIVISION OF ARABS AND MAY PERMIT ISRAEL TO ACQUIRE SOME VALUABLE TERRITORY. WE ASSUME THAT ISRAEL WOULD HAVE SOME VERY DEFINITE IDEAS ABOUT THE FORM PARTITION SHOULD TAKE, HOWEVER.

3. HOW MIGHT PARTITION COME ABOUT?

THERE ARE VARIOUS POSSIBLE SCENARIOS: (1) PRIME MINISTER DESIGNATE AL HOSS, OR A SUCCESSOR, MAY BE
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02707 01 OF 02 151126Z

UNABLE TO FORM A CABINET AND THE GOVERNMENT APPARATUS MAY SIMPLY CONTINUE TO DISINTEGRATE. IF THIS SITUATION CONTINUES LONG ENOUGH, PRESIDENT SARKIS MIGHT LOSE THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE AND RESIGN OR BE FORCED OUT; (2) EVENTS MIGHT OCCUR WHICH WOULD LEAD THE LEBANESE FRONT TO SECEDE AND SET UP ITS OWN GOVERNMENTAL APPARATUS IN CHRISTIAN LEBANON; (3) SYRIA MAY DECIDE TO WITHDRAW ITS FORCES. IF ANY OF THESE EVENTS TAKE PLACE, THERE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE RENEWED MAJOR FIGHTING. THE OUTCOME WOULD BE COMPLETELY UNPREDICTABLE, BUT THE HUMAN SUFFERING WOULD CERTAINLY BE ENORMOUS AND THE CONFLICT COULD WELL LEAD TO A WIDER WAR INVOLVING OTHER ARAB STATES AND ISRAEL.

4. WHERE WOULD THE LINES BE DRAWN?

HISTORICALLY, THE MARONITE HEARTLAND HAS EXTENDED FROM ZGHORTA TO THE DAMASCUS HIGHWAY, BUT, PARTICULARLY IN THE PAST 150 YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT EMIGRATION OUT OF THAT AREA INTO THE REST OF LEBANON AND TODAY SOME 200,000 OF THE COUNTRY'S 600,000 MARONITES LIVE IN AREAS OF NON-CHRISTIAN MAJORITIES. THE

SECTARIAN MOSAIC IS SO MIXED THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE
TO DRAW THE BOUNDARIES OF A REASONABLY-SHAPED STATE
WHICH DO NOT ISOLATE LARGE NUMBERS OF CHRISTIANS IN
MOSLEM-DOMINATED AREAS. MOUNT LEBANON STRETCHES IN
FACT AS FAR AS CHRISTIAN MARJAYUN, I.E., THE ISRAELI
BORDER, IN THE SOUTH, AND A STATE WHICH INCLUDED ALL
THE MOUNTAIN WOULD HAVE MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S DRUZE
WITHIN ITS BORDERS. IT IS POSSIBLE TO ENVISION A
CHRISTIAN-DRUZE STATE WHICH STRETCHED FROM ZGHORTA TO
MARJAYUN AND HAD DIRECT CONTACT WITH ISRAEL, EXCLUDING
A LARGE SHIA-SUNNI-PALESTINIAN LUMP ALONG THE COAST IN THE AREA
BETWEEN NAQURA AND BEIRUT, BUT THE LATTER WOULD BE PALESTINIAN

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02707 02 OF 02 151105Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2707

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

DOMINATED AND PROBABLY UNVIABLE, RADICAL, UNSTABLE AND
A DANGER AT LEAST TO ISRAEL IF NOT TO THE ENTIRE REGION.
IF THE CHRISTIAN STATE DID NOT HAVE CONTACT WITH
ISRAEL, THE MOSLEM STATE IN THE SOUTH WOULD HAVE CONTACT
WITH SYRIA THROUGH THE BEKAA, AND WE CANNOT ENVISAGE ISRAEL
AGREEING TO THAT. THE OTHER PREDOMINANTLY MOSLEM AREAS--THE
BEKAA, TRIPOLI AND AKKAR, WOULD NOT HAVE THE WHERE-
WITHAL TO BE A STATE. PRESUMABLY THEY WOULD BE ABSORBED
BY SYRIA, WHICH MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE PREPARED TO
SETTLE FOR THAT. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THIS WOULD DO
NOTHING TO RESOLVE THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, WHICH WOULD
STILL BE POSED IN THE MOSLEM FRAGMENT ALONG THE
MEDITERRANEAN. IN ANY CASE THE FINAL BOUNDARIES WOULD

APPEAR ONLY AFTER VICIOUS FIGHTING OVER THE MIXED
AREAS IN WHICH THOUSANDS OF CIVILIANS WOULD BE KILLED,
WOUNDED AND MADE HOMELESS.

5. THE IMPACT OF A PARTITIONED LEBANON ON THE MIDDLE
EAST PEACE PROCESS AND MIDDLE EAST STABILITY.
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02707 02 OF 02 151105Z

WE CANNOT SEE ANY WAY IN WHICH A MOVE IN THE
DIRECTION OF THE PARTITION OF LEBANON COULD HAVE ANY
POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS. ON
THE CONTRARY, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE RESULTING
INSTABILITY WOULD LEAD TO GREATER REGIONAL TENSIONS AND
ARMED CLASHES, NOT ONLY AMONG LEBANESE GROUPS BUT ALSO
BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL AS THEY SCRAMBLED FOR
PIECES OF LEBANON. FIGHTING IN LEBANON WOULD ALSO
INCREASE INTER-ARAB RIVALRIES AND WOULD ALSO GREATLY
REDUCE ISRAEL'S INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN ANY
NEGOTIATION LOOKING TOWARDS AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST
PEACE SETTLEMENT.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY.

THE USG IS WORKING FOR STABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
AND A COMPREHENSIVE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT. THE
CONTINUED COLLAPSE OF THE LEGAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND/
OR PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY INTO TWO OR MORE WARRING
FACTIONS, WITH THE LIKELIHOOD THAT OTHER ARAB
COUNTRIES AND ISRAEL WILL BE DRAWN IN, WILL BE DAMAGING
TO THESE U.S. GOALS. A MINORITY VIEW IS THAT PARTITION
WOULD NOT SERIOUSLY AFFECT U.S. INTERESTS ONCE IT WAS
ACCOMPLISHED, BUT THAT OTHER CONSIDERATIONS ARGUE
AGAINST U.S. ACQUIESCENCE IN PARTITION, INCLUDING THE FACT
THAT WE ARE ON RECORD AS OPPOSING IT, AND THAT THE ARAB/MOSLEM
WORLD MIGHT PERCEIVE IT AS A HOSTILE U.S. STRATEGEM.

7. IS THERE ANYTHING THE USG CAN OR SHOULD BE DOING
IN LEBANON TO PREVENT PARTITION FROM HAPPENING?

8. WITHIN THE EMBASSY, THREE DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON HOW
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02707 02 OF 02 151105Z

USG SHOULD REACT TO THE CURRENT SITUATION HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED:
(1) WE SHOULD DO LESS;

(2) WE SHOULD CONTINUE OUR PRESENT POLICY;

(3) WE SHOULD DO MORE.

IF THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 7 IS "NO, THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO (SHORT OF DIRECT USG MILITARY INTERVENTION, WHICH WE ASSUME IS A NON-STARTER) TO AFFECT THE BASIC COURSE OF EVENTS IN LEBANON," THEN IT FOLLOWS THAT THE USG SHOULD RESTRICT ITS ECONOMIC AID TO HUMANITARIAN PURPOSES AND SUSPEND MILITARY AID UNTIL WE HAVE A CLEARER IDEA OF THE KIND OF LEBANESE ARMY THAT WILL BE RECEIVING IT (OPTION 1). THOSE WHO FAVOR OPTION 2 BELIEVE THAT ALTHOUGH PRESENT USG POLICY IN LEBANON DOES NOT GUARANTEE THE PERMANENT UNITY OF LEBANON, THE WITHDRAWAL OF OUR SUPPORT NOW WOULD BE A GREVIOUS BLOW TO THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT AND WOULD STRENGTHEN THE DRIFT TOWARDS PARTITION (OPTION 2). THOSE FAVORING OPTION 3 BELIEVE THAT SINCE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PARTITION IN LEBANON WOULD BE GRAVELY DETRIMENTAL BOTH TO MAJOR US INTERESTS AND TO LEBANON ITSELF, THE USG SHOULD PLAN AND IF NECESSARY CARRY OUT SUCCESSIVELY MORE DRASTIC AND MORE RISKY STEPS TO STRENGTHEN THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN THE COUNTRY.

9. WE WOULD WELCOME COMMENTS BY ADDRESSEES ON ATTITUDES OF OTHER ME COUNTRIES TOWARDS PARTITION IN LEBANON AND ITS LIKELY IMPACT ON US INTERESTS IN THE AREA.

10. AMBASSADOR PARKER PARTICIPATED IN THE COUNTRY TEAM DISCUSSIONS PRIOR TO THE DRAFTING OF THIS MESSAGE, BUT HAS NOT SEEN THE FINAL VERSION.

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